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Exploration of the Interior of Alaska

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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

FEBRUARY 19, 1892.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. MANDERSON, from the Committee on Military Affairs, submitted the following

REPORT:

[To accompany S. 775.]

The Committee on Military Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (S. 775) entitled "A bill authorizing the Secretary of War to cause an exploration and survey to be made of the interior of the Territory of Alaska," have had the same under consideration and report it back favorably and recommend its passage.

Your committee adopt its report of last Congress made on this measure, as follows:

Alaska contains about 600,000 square miles of territory. The coast line has been followed and mapped, and we have fair knowledge, based upon reports rather than exploration, of the character of the country within a short distance of the ocean shore. We know very little, however, of the resources or capabilities of the interior. The Yukon River has been traversed in 1866 by the Western Union Telegraph Company as far as Fort Yukon; in 1869 by Capt. Raymond, U. S. Army, to the same point; in 1883 by Lieut. Schwatka, U. S. Army, from Lake Lindeman to its mouth; in 1885 by Lieut. Allen, U. S. Army, who ascended the Copper River, descended the Tanana River, crossed from the mouth of the Tanana to the Koyukuk, which he explored for some distance to the north and returned thence to its junction with the Yukon. These exploring parties were obliged to keep to the rivers, and the journeys were made in very great haste. The nature of the country was only to be guessed at, and its possibilities are practically unknown. It is believed, however, that besides the profitable trade in furs which has been carried on with the natives for many years there may be sufficient wealth in fish, lumber, and valuable minerals to repay development. Agriculture is successfully carried on in like latitudes in Russia, and the indications are that this interest might be sufficiently developed to provide for the wants of a population engaged in this pursuit. The suggestion is frequently made that great advantage might result to the United States and to the commercial world by a line of railroad that should run to the northwestern point of Alaska with a view to a connection with a railroad through Siberia, the terminal points of these roads being divided by the narrow sea called Bering Strait. All these suggestions show the absolute necessity that we should know more of the country, and it is not to our credit that it has remained so long a *terra incognita*. The existing maps of Alaska are largely guesswork. Lieut. Schwatka says: "All Alaska is filled up with rivers and their branches, even on Government maps, that have as yet to be traversed by white men in any capacity."

The proposition is, if this bill becomes a law, to send a thoroughly equipped party to a central point by steamer up the Yukon, and from this point, as a base, extend explorations in all directions; trained astronomers, topographers, photographers, naturalists, and geologists to be detailed from the several branches of the Government to accompany the expedition. The party should be supplied with all instruments necessary to the specialists accompanying it, and with such an outfit that the comfort and the safety of the party may be assured during an extended sojourn in a country so remote from any base of supplies. This bill has been referred to the War

Department, and the following is the copy of the letter from the Secretary of War. It will be seen by its perusal that both the Secretary and Major-General Commanding the Army deem it both desirable and important that a thoroughly organized and equipped party should be sent as soon as possible for the exploration of this territory.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, D. C., January 27, 1891.

SIR: I return herewith S. 4906, Fifty-first Congress, second session, "authorizing the Secretary of War to cause an exploration and survey to be made of the interior of the Territory of Alaska," referred to this Department on the 21st instant, and invite your attention to the inclosed copy of my letter of September 29, 1890, to the chairman of the House Committee on Military Affairs, on a similar bill (H. R. 12111, Fifty-first Congress, first session), a copy of which, together with the House report thereon (No. 3166), is also herewith.

Very respectfully,

REDFIELD PROCTOR,
Secretary of War.

The CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AFFAIRS,
United States Senate.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, D. C., September 29, 1890.

SIR: I have the honor to return herewith H. R. 12111, "authorizing the Secretary of War to cause an exploration and survey to be made of the interior of the Territory of Alaska," which was referred to this Department by letter dated the 25th instant, from Hon. F. W. Rockwell, of your committee, and to say that the bill meets with my earnest approval.

Nearly a quarter of a century has elapsed since the acquisition of Alaska by the United States, yet nothing, comparatively, is known of the interior of that vast region or of the resources or the inhabitants of that portion of it, and it seems to me to be very desirable and important an exploration of the Territory by thoroughly organized and equipped expeditions should be authorized as soon as possible.

I may add that the bill is also approved by the Major-General Commanding the Army.

Very respectfully,

REDFIELD PROCTOR,
Secretary of War.

Hon. B. M. CUTCHEON,
Chairman Committee on Military Affairs, House of Representatives.